

1st DISTRICT REPRESENTATIVE
AL O'BRIEN



A report on the 2010 session

Dear neighbors,

It has been a pleasure serving as your representative. As many of you know, I am not running for re-election this year.

It has been the greatest honor of my life to serve as a lawmaker from the 1st District -- and now it is time for me to retire for a second time.

This is my last message to the good people of the 1st District, so I want to do two things.

First, to report on what happened during the 2010 session of the Legislature.

Second, to look back at what we've accomplished in the past years and what lessons we can apply to the future.

I'll still be working for you the rest of the year. If you have ideas, questions or need help with a state agency, please contact my office. My door is always open.

Sincerely yours,

Al O'Brien
State Representative
1st Legislative District



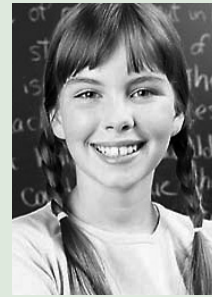
This year, we passed landmark public safety laws. Some came from the aftermath of four Lakewood police officers being gunned down, execution style, by an Arkansas convict who should have been in jail.

Other reforms came from our partnership with police, prosecutors and victim advocates.

PROTECTING CHILDREN FROM SEX OFFENDERS

(House Bill 2424)

Pedophiles are using new methods to watch and share child pornography on the internet, exploiting loopholes in our state laws.



Instead of keeping images and videos on hard drives or DVDs, they're viewing photos online or watching streaming video.

In one recent court case, police discovered evidence that an offender accessed and viewed 150 images of children being abused, but they could only file 10 charges. I believe child pornographers and pedophiles shouldn't get a volume discount, and House Bill 2424 -- which is now the law in our state -- closes this loophole.

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and Emergency
Preparedness
Committee

Member - Human Services
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Appropriations

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RANDY’S LAW

(House Bill 1203 / Senate Bill 6293)

Family members have helped criminals get away with murder -- literally -- only to be slapped on the wrist by the courts because of flaws in our laws.

This happened in the case of Maurice Clemmons, the convict who executed four Lakewood police officers last fall. He told family members that he was going to shoot police officers before going back to prison. He got a ride to and from the crime scene. Family members loaned him their cars, cleaned his wounds and hid him from the police.

There is another case where family members helped dispose of the body of a murder victim, and state law has historically gone lighter on family members in such incidents. Randy’s Law, which the governor signed, changes the offense of rendering criminal assistance from a Class C felony to a Class B felony, which will send the right message: we won’t tolerate people who help murderers and other thugs. If a person 18 or older renders criminal assistance to a family member, aside from giving first aid, the criminal penalties will be the same as if they were not related to the perpetrator.

PROTECTING YOUR PRIVACY

(House Bill 2817 / Senate Bill 6361)

It’s natural people -- especially parents and grandparents -- to want to know where registered sex offenders might be living in their town. Washington was one of the first states to pass a law requiring that information be made available. It’s the kind of information that can keep families safe.

But it’s wrong to make it public information when somebody signs up for e-mail alerts regarding sex offender registrations. Often, crime victims will sign up so they can know when offenders are released in their town or county. Giving people -- including offenders -- the right to request the names of people on the notification list is wrong. Crime victims, especially sex crime victims, want nothing to do with offenders. Any sort of contact is traumatizing.

This bill protects the privacy of these lists, which helps protect families and crime victims.

CHANGING THE CONSTITUTION

(House Joint Resolution 4220)

Maurice Clemmons was repeatedly arrested, yet he posted bail again and again until he executed those four police officers. He only got out because our state constitution requires that judges set bail, except for aggravated first-degree murder cases.

House Joint Resolution 4220 is a constitutional amendment that passed the House and Senate and will now go before the voters. Because this is an official newsletter, I cannot urge you to support or oppose the bill. I can only inform you about the measure and ask you to please give it due attention when you make your decision.

BANNING THE PRACTICE OF BOOKING BAIL

(House Bill 2625)

In some counties, people arrested on the weekends don’t see a judge to set bail. Judges in Pierce County and elsewhere don’t work on weekends, so jail guards would simply look at how many crimes you were charged with and, say, multiply that by \$10,000 a crime. That was your bail.

House Bill 2625 ended that practice. Every suspect must now see a judge before being released.

THE FAMILIES OF THE FALLEN

(House Bill 2519)

Police officers and firefighters risk their lives every day to protect and take care of us. State law, however, didn’t take care of their families. If you were a police officer or fighter with less than 10 years of service and you died in the line of duty, your family got nothing.

House Bill 2519 changed that. It gives death benefits to families of fallen heroes and makes sure their children can go to college. It’s hard enough paying for college with two working parents; losing one parent can end the dream of getting a college education.

TOUGHER PENALTIES FOR DRUNK DRIVERS

My brother, Christopher, was killed by a drunk driver in 1967, so there’s kind of a personal reason for wanting tougher sentences. There are also good policy reasons to focus on drunk driving, since it’s the No. 1 cause of preventable death on our roads.

I’m proud to say that our state lowered the drunk driving limit and got tough on repeat drunk drivers by requiring ignition interlocks on convicted drunks in 2008. We also increased penalties on drunk drivers who cause deadly crashes.

I was chairman of the Criminal Justice and Corrections Committee in the House for 10 years. The highlighted bills passed into law during my chairmanship.

FIGHTING STREET GANGS

Rebecca Lambert was a mother with a story to tell: “He was a beautiful boy, with a smile so charming it could make you forgive any transgression. They stripped him and his friends naked. They pistol-whipped him, used a bat on him and fractured his skull.”

In 2008, Rebecca drove to Olympia to testify for House Bill 2712, and that bill created a three-part plan to stop gangs from recruiting our kids, rescue kids who are in gangs and break up existing gangs.

When she came to Olympia to testify, Rebecca said that for the first time since her son was murdered, she feels hope. That’s why we’re doing this. This is about hope conquering fear.

If we put aside politics and work together, we can push out gangs and stop them from preying on our kids and our fears.

GETTING TOUGH ON SEX OFFENDERS

In 2006, we partnered with police and prosecutors to pass more than 20 bills getting tough on sex offenders along with funding in the budget to implement those reforms, including a landmark law (House Bill 3277) giving rapists and child molesters 25 years to life for serious offenses committed against children.

MISSING PERSONS

I worked four years on legislation to improve the way we deal with missing persons.

In 2006, we made progress with House Bill 2805, which will make our state much better at finding missing persons. This reform created a statewide website for posting information about missing persons, required investigators to collect DNA evidence in missing person cases and puts dental records and other information in the State Patrol’s missing persons database.

CRACKING COLD CASES WITH DNA

Sex offenders are tough to catch. Victims are traumatized and embarrassed and often don’t want to testify -- or they’re little kids and it’s hard for them to take the stand. There aren’t usually other witnesses to the crime. All you have is the victim’s testimony and maybe some physical evidence.

DNA evidence is different. It’s better than fingerprint smudges or witness descriptions. It’s solid, scientific proof. In 2008, we passed House Bill 2713 to require all sex offenders, plus those convicted of kidnapping, to submit DNA samples. This law has helped crack cold cases and catch offenders who would otherwise still be out there, victimizing more people.

AUTO THEFT

Years ago, a car was stolen every 11 minutes in this state. It was an epidemic, and the penalties for car thieves were light. It was common for thieves to get arrested seven times before they saw any jail time. After House Bill 1001 passed in 2007, we went after professional car thieves, and today, auto theft is way down in this state.



SIGNING OFF

I want to thank all the citizens who took the time to get involved, including those with whom I may have disagreed on some issues. We could not have passed tough laws and landmark reforms without your help.

In my time as a lawmaker, I’ve tried to work with everyone -- police and prosecutors, Republicans and Democrats, crime victims and citizens. Our best work comes when we work together, and I want to encourage every citizen to get informed and involved in their democracy. You can make a difference.

When we lower the partisan walls that separate us, and work together to do the common good, the people – all people – are better served.

Finally, I must mention what I believe to be the best bill that I passed during my years in Olympia. It was a bill that was intended to reduce the number of abandoned babies in our state.

Laws meant to protect babies from being abandoned weren’t working how they expected, because young mothers and others who thought they couldn’t care for a newborn didn’t want to go to jail. We changed the law so that every hospital and fire department became a safe place to bring a child, no questions asked, no threat of jail. This has saved many lives of newborns in our state.